

Ghadīr Khumm

Ghadīr Khumm (Khummm Pond) was a pond, which no longer exists, located at Juḥfa, on the caravan route between Mecca and Medina. In the time of the prophet Muḥammad, the pond belonged to the Kināna and Khuzā'a tribes (Caetani, 1 H., §76, n. 4, and §78, n. 3). Ghadīr Khumm is associated with an important event in the life of Muḥammad, the differing interpretations of which are one of the main reasons for the schism between Sunnīs and Shī'īs.

The story of the event is transmitted, with many variations, by numerous Shī'ī and Sunnī sources. On 18 Dhū l-Ḥijja 10/16 March 632, returning from his farewell pilgrimage (*ḥajjat al-wadā'*), Muḥammad halted at Ghadīr Khumm, took the hand of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), and made a speech to a large number of his followers and main Companions. The most important sentences of this speech are those involving terms belonging to the root *w-l-y* and concern the *walāya* (alliance or friendship with God that makes its possessor a man of God, a saint) of Muḥammad and 'Alī. The Prophet first asked the believers, "Am I not closer (*awlā*) to the believers than they are to themselves?" After the positive response of all present, he proclaimed, "Anyone who has me as his *mawlā*, has 'Alī as his *mawlā*" (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa-'Aliyyun mawlāh*). Some *ḥadīths* add a sentence: "O God, befriend the friend of 'Alī and be the

enemy of his enemy" (*Allāhumma wālī man wālāhu wa 'ādī man 'ādāh*). In other versions of this tradition, the word *mawlā* is replaced by *walī*.

The philological study of words belonging to the root *w-l-y* in use during the first centuries of the *hijra*—especially *mawlā*, *walī*, *walāya* or *muwālā*, and *tawallī*—shows their wealth and semantic complexity. We find notions of authority, power, governance, friendship, love, and closeness but also religious and theological meanings referring to prophetic charisma, divine election, and the covenant with God in an almost biblical sense (Amir-Moezzi, *Walāya* imamite; Dakake, *Charismatic community*, pts. 1 and 2). For supporters of 'Alī, whom ancient sources sometimes called followers of "the religion of 'Alī" (*dīn 'Alī*) but more often Alids, these phrases of the Prophet irrefutably designated 'Alī as the sole legitimate successor to Muḥammad on both the spiritual and temporal levels (Amir-Moezzi, *L'expression dīn 'Alī*). Their successors, who would come to be called Shī'īs, believe the same thing. The famous phrase of the speech of the Prophet would come to be called by them "the *ḥadīth* of the *walāya*." Indeed, several categories of Shī'ī sources, have, since the early days of Islam, continued to highlight the Ghadīr Khumm event and the *ḥadīth* of the *walāya* for their recognition of 'Alī and his descendants, the Imāms, as the only legitimate

successors of Muḥammad, and of the opponents of ‘Alī and the prophetic family (*ahl al-bayt*)—especially those who forced the latter out of the succession to Muḥammad and fought the Imāms—as the enemies of Muḥammad and Islam.

Pre-eminent among these sources is the immense corpus of Shī‘ī *ḥadīth*: many chapters on various topics treat the phrases of Ghadīr Khumm, especially the chapters on *walāya* and on the notion of “official designation” (*naṣṣ, tanṣīṣ*) of the Imāms. A second category of sources comprises the literature of anti-Sunnī controversy, the works on *mathālib* (“blaming the opponents of the Imāms”), or the *manāqib* (“in praise of the Imāms and their followers”), or the literary genre of “virtues of Shī‘īs” (*faḍā’il al-shī‘a; ṣifāt al-shī‘a*). There are also lexical monographs on words from the root *w-l-y*, especially *mawlā*, the key term of the speech at Ghadīr Khumm. The earliest writings of this kind that have come down to us include the *Ma‘ānī l-akhbār* of Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq (d. 381/991), the *Risāla fī ma‘nā l-mawlā* or *Aqṣām al-mawlā fī l-lisān* of al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), and the long lexical chapter in *al-Shāfi fī l-imāma* of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044–5). There is also the genre called *Ghadīriyyāt*, poems in Arabic and Persian on various aspects and implications of Ghadīr Khumm and praise of ‘Alī as the successor of Muḥammad. The oldest examples of

this genre apparently belong to the Persian *ghadīriyya* of the fourth/tenth century and are attributed to Kasā‘ī Marwazī (d. 341/952–3); they were developed extensively in Ṣafavid Iran in the eleventh/seventeenth century (Sajjādī, *Ghadīriyya*; Amir-Moezzi, *Combattant*, 353–4).

Many Sunnī sources, too, report the event and the speech of Ghadīr Khumm. The most important are probably Ibn Ḥanbal’s (d. 241/855) *Musnad* (many places), Ibn ‘Asākir’s (d. 571/1175–6) *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dimashq* of (42:187–238), and Ibn Kathīr’s (d. 774/1373) *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nihāya* (5:150–63). For Sunnī authors, however, the traditions of Ghadīr Khumm, which stress so obviously the immense respect that Muslims must pay to ‘Alī, do not justify the claims of Shī‘īs, because nothing in the speech of the Prophet refers explicitly to his cousin and son-in-law as his successor. The word *mawlā* there means only “friend, one who is loyal, close,” and the Prophet simply requires friendship and respect for ‘Alī. According to Ibn Kathīr (5:160), the source of the claims of the Alids is the Sunnī historian al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), who, in his two-volume work dedicated to Ghadīr Khumm—which is apparently lost today but is presumably the *Kitab al-faḍā’il* quoted by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) in his *Mu‘jam al-udabā’*—reported a variety of traditions, including many weak ones on which Shī‘īs based their assertions. There is, however, some

unease among non-Shīʿī authors with the story that appears to justify the Alid claims. Neither al-Ṭabarī, in his *Taʾrīkh*, nor authors as important as Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), in his *Sīra*, or Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), in his *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, say anything about the event at Ghadīr Khumm or the Prophet’s speech. Also important is the silence, at first surprising, of the Shīʿī author al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1016), in his *Nahj al-balāgha*. The predicament of this senior employee of the Būyid government must have had other reasons: the rise to power of the Shīʿī Būyids to the leadership of the ‘Abbāsīd state, the keeping of the Sunnī caliph on the throne, and his desire to avoid provoking the religious sensitivities of the majority Sunnī population.

Shīʿī authors report many more details about the causes, circumstances, and consequences of Ghadīr Khumm. According to them, Muḥammad already knew, through divine revelation, that ‘Alī was his successor. He then received God’s command that he proclaim the election of ‘Alī without fear of the reaction of his opponents, as witnessed in Qur’ān 5:67: “O Messenger! Make known that which has been revealed to you from your Lord, because, if you do not, you will not have revealed His message. God will protect you from mankind.” In a variant of this tradition, the original Qur’ān, before its alleged falsification by the opponents of ‘Alī, contained in

this verse an explicit mention of ‘Alī: “Make known that which has been revealed to you from your Lord *about ‘Alī*” (al-Sayyārī, p. 45 of the Arabic text, and note 165, pp. 115–6; on the “falsification” of the Qur’ān, see Amir-Moezzi and Kohlberg). Muḥammad then made his speech in Ghadīr Khumm. At the same time, he announced his imminent death and advised his followers to remain loyal to “two precious things” (*al-thaqalayn*): the Holy Book and his family (on the *ḥadīth al-Thaqalayn*, see Bar-Asher, 93–8, and Amir-Moezzi, *Coran silencieux*, 101ff). The faithful then congratulated ‘Alī and saluted him with the title of “Commander of the Faithful” (*amīr al-muʾminīn*). Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. c. 40/659), the Prophet’s poet, then recited a poem in honour of ‘Alī as the successor of Muḥammad. This poem, whose attribution does not seem to be problematic, reported by Ibn Shahrāshūb (d. 588/1192) in his *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib* (2:230), is the oldest literary attestation of the event. Another early poet, the Shīʿī al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī (d. 126/743), composed verses on the same theme.

On the day of the event, the Prophet received the revelation in Q 5:3: “This day, I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favour unto you.” Again, according to the Shīʿī partisans of the theory of falsification of the Qur’ān, this verse originally contained an explicit reference to the *walāya* of ‘Alī: “This day, I have

perfected your religion for you *thanks to the walāya of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib* and completed my favour unto you” (al-‘Ayyāshī, 1:293, no. 21; al-Baḥrānī, 1:444; al-Majlisī, 9:306). The rich and abundant documents of Shī‘ī and Sunnī sources on Ghadīr Khumm were collected masterfully by the great Shī‘ī scholar al-‘Allāma ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Amīnī (d. 1970), in the eleven volumes of his monumental *al-Ghadīr fī l-kitāb wa-l-sunna wa l-adab*.

The historical and doctrinal importance of Ghadīr Khumm has made the date of 18 Dhū l-Ḥijja one of the most important Shī‘ī festivals (Ibn al-Jawzī, 14:151; Ibn Kathīr, 9:259ff.). It was apparently the Būyid *amīr* Aḥmad b. Buwayh (Būya) Mu‘izz al-Dawla (r. 334–56/945–67), who for the first time, in 352/964, ordered a great public celebration of the feast in Baghdad. Before that, Mu‘izz al-Dawla had organised, in the month of Muḥarram of the same year, a public celebration of ‘Āshūrā to celebrate the martyrdom of the Imām al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī (d. 61/680), although it is possible that this decision of the Būyid *amīr* was in response to the celebration of Shī‘ī festivals, including Ghadīr Khumm, by the Fāṭimid caliphs (Kazemi Moussavi, 248a). The reaction of the Sunnī population of Baghdad was immediate. The 26 Dhū l-Ḥijja was decreed the day of Abū Bakr as “the Companion of the cave” (i.e., the most intimate friend) of the Prophet. After Mu‘izz al-Dawla, the *amīr* ‘Aḍud al-Dawla (r. 367–72/978–

83) celebrated more gloriously Shī‘ī festivals and pilgrimages (Ibn Ṭāwūs, 132). In 371/981, on the anniversaries of the festivals, there were violent clashes between the Sunnī and Shī‘ī communities in the capital. The same sort of civil violence led to the prohibition of the religious celebration in 382/992 and 392/1001.

During the centuries that followed the fall of Būyids, the public celebration of the Day of Ghadīr appears to have been abandoned. It was with the rise of the Ṣafavids in Iran in the early tenth/sixteenth century and the declaration of Imāmi Shī‘ism as the state religion that the festival regained its glory. The two main compilers of *ḥadīth* of that time, al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī (d. 1104/1693), in his *Wasā’il al-shī‘a* (5:224 and 10:302), and especially Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1111/1700), in his *Biḥār al-anwār* (97:358–73), report in their respective huge compilations numerous *ḥadīths* on the central importance of the celebration of Ghadīr Khumm and its role in the renewal of the loyalty of believers in the Imāms (*tadhakkur al-‘ahd*). Making a pilgrimage to the shrine of ‘Alī in Najaf on the day of Ghadīr Khumm was considered one of the most important Shī‘ī acts of worship. The festival became one of the most important holidays in all Shī‘ī lands, in Iran, Iraq, India, and elsewhere, and remains so to the present, but it is mainly in Iran that the celebration took on a special

importance, especially in political terms, as the court and the government played an important role, especially during the Qājār era (eighteenth-twentieth centuries). The anniversary of the event in 1833 is remembered, as the feast was at that time extended to a week, and many princes and other notables celebrated their marriages during that week (Rāvandī, 6:610ff.). Since the end of the Qājār period, the festival of Ghadīr Khumm, often accompanied by a pilgrimage to the tombs of the Imāms, has become one of the most important Shī'ī popular practices. Ghadīr Khumm is today celebrated with great pomp, from the highest levels of government to the bazaars of great cities and the mosques of small villages, and long extracts from the work of al-'Allāma al-Amīnī are read in public.

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